



Armenian National Committee of America – Western Region

October 6, 2015

History-Social Science Subject Matter Committee
Instructional Quality Commission
1430 N Street, Suite #5111
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: History-Social Science Framework revised on 9/25/15 (amended October 1)

Dear Committee Members:

The purpose of our letter is to bring several serious errors pertaining to the Armenian Genocide in the proposed draft for the History-Social Science Curriculum Framework for Grades 9-12 to your attention. We have been communicating our concerns to the Department of Education and the California History Social Science Project, and we appreciate that one of the more egregious inaccurate statements was omitted in the most recent draft which was released on October 1. However, there remain some errors which still must be corrected.

The Armenian Genocide was first formally integrated into the public school curriculum in accordance with Assembly Bill 1273 in 1985. The Curriculum Framework and Content Standards were modified subsequently, such that the Armenian Genocide would be taught as a part of the World History curriculum. The Armenian Genocide is recognized as a prototype for later genocides, so it plays a vital role in providing context in educating our students about human rights violations. Accordingly, we strongly urge the members of the History-Social Science SMC and the Instructional Quality Commission to join us in increasing awareness of this under-recognized historical event in California's classrooms by accurately portraying this historical event.

We appreciate the deletion of the erroneous interpretation and implication that the Armenian Genocide was committed “because of Armenian nationalist aspirations and evidence of collaboration with Russia against the Turkish state” from the most recent draft of the framework and we are grateful to all those involved for having rectified the matter. However, several other issues remain unresolved, and in light of the continuing denial of the Genocide, it is vital that our California students be taught about the Genocide, and all genocides, in a comprehensive and accurate manner. Towards that end, we'd like to continue working with the Department to amend the existing language and to make sure that the guiding documents used by our teachers enables them to teach about this subject matter in an accurate and comprehensive manner.

The following are the mischaracterizations and erroneous information which remain in the draft and must be addressed:

1. Line 619-620: The phrase, “the Turkish government, *or elements within it*” indicates that it's not clear whether it was the government, or “rogue” individuals or groups within it, who carried out the genocide. What does that mean? That the Ottoman/Turkish government did not actually order the mass deportations and murder of the Armenian population? Scholarship on the Armenian Genocide has left no doubt that the crimes were clearly a government program and we feel the words “*or elements within it*” should also be deleted.

2. Line 620-621: Saying simply that the government ordered a “mass deportation” gives the false impression that the government’s intent was not to annihilate the Armenian people, but merely to move them, and to reduce the description of that genocide to the overly simplistic and one-dimensional term, “mass deportation,” results in a grossly misleading characterization of this event. The purpose of all of the brutal actions taken against the Armenians – arrest and mass murder of hundreds of Armenian leaders at the genocide’s outset; then rape, torture, maiming, starvation, holocausts in desert caves during mass deportations, as well as widespread kidnapping and forced Turkification and Islamization of women and children, and seizure of all personal and community properties, etc – these were the acts that made up the Armenian Genocide. “Mass deportation” was simply one of the means employed to achieve the objective of genocide. In addition, the motivation for this crime must be understood as part of a plan of “pan-Turkism” to eradicate all non-muslim minorities from Turkey, as evidenced by the murder of not only the Armenians, but of hundreds of thousands of Greeks and Assyrians as well.

3. Lines 622-623: Similar to the second item above, the sentence, “Ottoman authorities force marched Armenians to the Syrian and Mesopotamian deserts, an act of genocide that cost perhaps one million lives” also gives the false impression that mass deportations were the only mechanism that constituted the Armenian Genocide. As noted earlier, the Armenian Genocide was many-faceted, with all methods, including the death marches geared towards the goal of erasing Armenian civilization and culture.

Also, the phrase “...cost perhaps one million lives” is dangerously erroneous. The use of “perhaps” suggests that the number killed could be at most one million, although in fact, most scholars agree that approximately 1.5 million, two-thirds or more of the Armenian people living in their historic homeland were killed. It is important for students to learn this fact accurately and in context, in order to grasp the enormity of the devastation.

Additionally, the draft frameworks are not consistent with Government Code Section 6720, which recognizes the Armenian Genocide as: *“April 24 of each year shall be the “California Day of Remembrance of the Armenian Genocide,” and the period beginning on the Sunday before that day through the following Sunday shall be the days of remembrance in this state, and shall annually be so proclaimed by the Governor, in memory of the 1,500,000 victims who were subjected to torture, starvation, and murder, including death marches into the Syrian desert, by the rulers of the Ottoman Turkish Empire and the exile of more than 500,000 innocent people during the period from 1915 to 1923, inclusive, and in honor of the survivors of those crimes against humanity.”*

Our preference is that lines 619-633 be modified to read:

In 1915, as the Ottoman Empire declined, the Turkish government, carried out a systematic genocide against the Armenian population that had been living on its historic homeland in what is now eastern Turkey. Turkish authorities first arrested hundreds of Armenian political and intellectual leaders, sending them to their deaths; Armenian men were conscripted into work camps where they were killed outright or through exhaustion; The remaining Armenians were ordered onto death marches into the Syrian desert, during which they were subjected to rape, torture, mutilation, starvation, holocausts in desert caves, kidnapping and forced Turkification and Islamization.

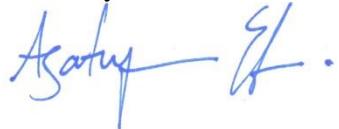
Approximately 1.5 million Armenians, more than half of the population, were eliminated in this way, virtually all their personal and community properties were seized by the government, and more than 500,000 innocent people were forced into exile during the period from 1915 to 1923.

Within the context of human rights and genocide, students should learn of the Ottoman government's planned systematic annihilation of the Armenian population in 1915. The Armenian Genocide that opened the twentieth century would be followed by the Holocaust and others in Cambodia, Rwanda, and Darfur at the opening of the twenty-first century. Students should also examine the reactions of other governments, including that of the United States, and world opinion during and after the Armenian genocide. Teachers can introduce the history of the Near East Relief organization established by the former U.S. ambassador to the Ottoman Empire, Henry Morgenthau. Near East Relief came to the aid of hundreds of thousands of Armenian Genocide survivors through the establishment of orphanages, food and vocational programs, etc. Teachers can also use the example of the first international aid project of the Red Cross, that of helping Armenian Genocide survivors, and the prevalent use of the phrase, "Remember the starving Armenians!" as a means to demonstrate to students the profound effect the Armenian Genocide had on the American public. They should examine the effects of the genocide on the remaining Armenian people, who were deprived of their historic homeland, and the ways in which it became a prototype of subsequent genocides. What were the consequences of World War I for nations, ethnic groups, and people?

There is a significant amount of scholarship which supports the provisions of the language that we have included which we can readily provide to you and accordingly, we urge you to adopt the language above in lieu of the language in the current draft.

Please let us know if we can be of assistance in any way, and thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Asatryan E." followed by a period.

Elen Asatryan
Executive Director
Armenian National Committee of America, Western Region